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LETTER
TO THE
COMMITTEE

Appointed by the
College of Physicians

To Review their *Pharmacopœia*:

Containing some REMARKS on their *Draught*
for the Reformation of the

LONDON PHARMACOPŒIA.

By *RICHARD REYNELL*, Apothecary.

L O N D O N :

Printed for M. COOPER, at the *Globe* in *Pater-noster-Row*.

MDCCXLIII.

LETTER

COMMITTEE

College of Physicians

LONDON PHARMACEUTICAL

RICHARD REYNOLDS, Secretary.

LONDON

Printed for J. Gorton, at the Office of the Registrar-General

MDCCCXIII

LETTER, &c.

Gentlemen,

I TAKE the Liberty of giving you the Trouble of an Epistolary Address, on account of a few Observations I have to make upon your *Draught* for the Reformation of the *London Pharmacopæia*, prepared for the Perusal of the Members of the College of *Physicians* by you as a *Committee* appointed to that Purpose; which I take to be agreeable to the Design of publishing it. You have made a considerable Progress in the same, and given a full Idea of the Principles upon which you have proceeded: And a very worthy Member of the College, who has assuredly the publick Good at heart, has thought fit to provide every Member with a Copy of what they have hitherto done, that they might not any longer be deprived of the Assistance of the whole Body, in what is farther requisite for perfecting the Design; and he has been so kind as to give Copies to several of my Bretheren, as well as myself; and desired we would give notice of such Observations and Remarks upon Drugs or Medicines, as were faithfully deduced from our own Practice and Experience.

I am very glad to hear, that you have received plentiful Remarks, and that this Work is like to be brought to a short Issue; so as that, by next Spring, we may expect a *Pharmacopæia* purged as much as possible from all Superfluities and Irregularities abounding in the former, and that this may be rendered a true Pattern to the other People of *Europe*, and to After-times, of the natural and just Simplicity, to which the Practice of Physic is now brought among us.

I shall here premise some Reasons that induced me to undertake this Task, and then set forth the Subject Matter of the ensuing Letter, taken from an Article of your brief Account of the Proceeding of the Committee appointed by the College to review the *Pharmacopæia*.

Dr. Madden, a Physician in *Dublin*, in a Letter to Dr. Mortimer, Secretary to the Royal Society, published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, Numb. 418, gives an Account of *two Women being poisoned by the simple distilled Water of Laurel Leaves*, and of several Experiments upon Dogs; by which it appears, that this Laurel Water is one of the most dangerous Poisons hitherto known. The Water, he says, is at first of a milky Colour, but the Oil which comes over the Helms with it being in a good measure separated from the Phlegm, by passing it through a Flannel Bag, it becomes as clear as common Water. It has the Smell of the bitter Almond, or Peach Kernel, and has been for many Years in frequent Use among our Housewives and Cooks, to give that agreeable Flavour to their Creams and Puddings. It has also been much in Use among our Drinkers of Drams; and the Proportion they generally use it in

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has been one Part of *Laurel Water* to four of Brandy. Nor had this Practice (however frequent) ever been attended with any apparent ill Consequences, till some time in the Month of *September* 1728. The Doctor does not give the Process of this *Laurel Water* there mentioned; but it seems to have been made as strong as possible by the Effects.

Since Dr. *Madden's* Letter, Dr. *Mortimer* made several Experiments before the Royal Society concerning the *poisonous Quality* of the *simple Water* distilled from the *Lauro-Cerasus*, or *common Laurel*, made upon Dogs; and in Numb. 420, gives the Process of the Water used in those Experiments, which is as follows:

“ I took a Peck of Laurel Leaves, and put them into
 “ an Alembic, with three Gallons of Water, which I
 “ distilled in the common Way, as Pennyroyal, Mint
 “ Water, or any Simple Waters are made. The Fire
 “ at first being too hot, there came over an Oiliness
 “ with the Water, (1.) which made it appear milky,
 “ till about half a Pint had run: This tasted and smelt
 “ very strong, like Apricock Kernels, as did the next
 “ Running, (2.) which was clearer: I kept the first
 “ Quart of it by itself; then I drew off another Quart,
 “ (3.) which was not near so strong in Taste or Smell,
 “ but rather resembled *Black-Cherry Water*: The Re-
 “ mainder was almost insipid, the Leaves, after the Distil-
 “ lation, looked brownish, were brittle, and tasted bit-
 “ ter, without the Roughness, or Apricock-Kernel
 “ Flavour, which they have while fresh.” Thus far
 Dr. *Mortimer*.

No wonder a Water (though simple as it is called) made by such a Process, should prove poisonous; for I cannot but think, that several Waters, set down in the College's Catalogue, under such Management, and contrived by Art to extract a poisonous Quality from the Ingredient, may be rendered such, and furnish the Curious with sufficient Experiments of their poisonous Effects to some of the Animal Kind. I would not be thought to reflect upon the Process above as injudicious, but suppose the Doctor took that Method as most conducive to make sure Work, that his Experiments might not fail him without Loss of Time. I am credibly informed, that the *Juice* of two *Coss Lettices* will kill a very strong Man; and nevertheless, we find by Experience, they are very good Salleting, rather salutary than pernicious, and of late Years very much eaten; and a Simple Water from the *Lettices* is accounted good, and medicinal abroad.

These Experiments concerning the *poisonous Quality* of the *Simple Water* distilled from the *Lauro-Cerasus*, or common Laurel, upon Dogs, has made a great Noise in the World; and to be sure it was very proper that the Nature of its *poisonous Quality* should have been published, to put the unthinking Part of Mankind upon their Guard, and prevent them falling into an Error that was accidentally fatal to a few; by which means a great many others may be deterred from any farther Use of a Water, that cannot be put to any but a bad Use: And if any very small Water of this Kind has been used instead of *Black-Cherry Water*, it was an abominable Cheat; yet I never knew, nor heard of any Mischief happening

happening from the Use of a small *Laurel*, or *Almond Water*, made for the Purpose to counterfeit *Black-Cherry Water*; though the Practice has been said to be very common among those Dealers in Medicines, that have no Regard to any thing, but study to find out Ways of sophisticating the most common Medicines for private Gain.

As to the frequent Use of *Laurel Water* among our Housewives and Cooks to give that agreeable Flavour to their Creams and Puddings, I believe it to be very rare, for the common Practice in that Way has been to boil up three or four Laurel Leaves in a Quart of Milk or Cream, and then strain it off for Use, which gives a very good Flavour, and I never heard of any bad Effects from it, though in common Use, in many Families; and the Laurel Leaves were always used in that Proportion: It may be, that some few, who have had the Art of mixing *Laurel Water* with their Brandy, &c. may have done the like in these sort of things; but as before, we have heard of no ill Effects that have followed upon this Account. As to the Laurel Water's being much in Use among our Drinkers of Drams, and the Proportion they make use of, that is a Mystery of Iniquity, I am wholly unacquainted with; but if one Part in four be the common Proportion, an old habituate Dram-Drinker must take as much in one Day as would poison two or three People in the common way; and yet Dr. *Madden* remarks, that this Practice (however frequent) had never been attended with any apparent ill Consequences, till some time in the Month of *September 1728*.

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Since this Noise about *Laurel Water*, and its bad Effects, a great Stir has been made about the *Black-Cherry Water of the Shops*, as if the Use of that, from a Parity of Reason, might be hazardous, because some *Virtuosi* had found out, that they could extract a poisonous Quality from the Distillation of the Stones of Black Cherries; but I thought this was like to go no farther than to furnish the Town with a little *Novelty*; and that it did not come from the Gentlemen of the Faculty, till I found the following Article in your brief Account of the Proceedings of the Committee appointed by the College of Physicians to review their *Pharmacopæia*, which I shall here insert *verbatim*, with some Remarks, and leave it to you, Gentlemen, to consider, whether the *Black-Cherry Water of the Shops* may not, or indeed ought not, to be continued a Simple Water in your Catalogue. I have made it above thirty Years, and it has always kept the Year round, or much longer, perfectly clear, well tasted, and greatly approved of by several Gentlemen of the Faculty. The Article is as follows: “ *Aqua Cerasorum nigrorum*, though in daily Use, is omitted. “ This Water receives its Flavour principally from the “ Kernels of the Cherry-Stones. Those Kernels, like “ many others, bear a Resemblance in Taste to the “ Leaves of the *Lauro-Cerasus*, which have some time “ past been discovered to yield by Infusion, or Distillation, the most sudden Poison known; and some Gentlemen of *Worcester* have lately found by Trials purposely made, that a distilled Water, very strongly “ impregnated with the Flavour of these Kernels, will “ produce the like poisonous Effects. Indeed the Water “ of our *Pharmacopæia*, after such long-continued Experience

" perience cannot be imagined to be in general dange-
 " rous, with its common Degree of Strength. These
 " Kernels plainly resemble Opium, and some other
 " things, which poison only in too great Quantity. The
 " Water from the very Laurel Leaves is harmless, when
 " duly diluted; and even Spirit of Wine proves a Poison
 " of a kind not greatly different, if drank to a certain
 " degree of Excess. But notwithstanding this, it is
 " possible, that the Water in question may not be alto-
 " gether safe in the tender Age of Infants; it may there
 " have had pernicious Effects without having been sus-
 " pected, the Symptoms it produces resembling such as
 " Infants are frequently thrown into from their Diseases.
 " On this Consideration, the Committee have thought it
 " not a superfluous Caution to lay aside a Water, which
 " is only used for the Agreeableness of its Flavour; es-
 " pecially as it is often counterfeited with bitter Al-
 " monds, which, by repeated Experiments, are well
 " known to produce the same poisonous Water as the
 " Laurel Leaves themselves." Thus far the Article—
 As to the first Part of it, which sets forth, *that the*
Black-Cherry Water receives its Flavour principally from
the Kernels of the Cherry-Stones, which bears a Resem-
blance in Taste to the Leaves of the Lauro-Cerasus, I
 am well satisfied, it will be found by Experience, that
 the Black-Cherry Water of the Dispensatory, properly
 made, has such a peculiar Taste *sui generis*, that I defy
 all the Adulterators of this Water to come so near to
 it, as to deceive even an Apothecary's Apprentice, that
 has ever made, and tasted the genuine Black-Cherry
 Water. Besides, from what has happened, surely no
 Man of Character will venture to impose upon you,
 Gentlemen, any Fallacy of this kind for the future,

when you give notice, that a particular Direction is given in your Dispensatory, and that a Compliance with it is positively required, to prevent any ill Consequences that may arise from an Abuse of this kind. I am now, to take notice of *the Gentlemen of Worcester's having, lately found by Trials purposely made, that a distilled Water very strongly impregnated with the Flavour of Black-Cherry Kernels, will produce the like poisonous Effects with Laurel and Almond Water.* I shall here subjoin the Manner, in which the Black-Cherry Water, they made use of, was drawn: "To fourteen Pound
 " of *Black-Cherry Stones* bruised, they added a Quantity of Water sufficient to prevent burning. (which
 " in this Experiment was about six Gallons) and drew
 " off in a hot Still seven Quarts. *The first Quart* that
 " run, they reserved by itself, and *with that* they made
 " their Experiments upon Dogs." And this they termed a *genuine Black-Cherry Water.* But the London Dispensatory, published by the College of Physicians, directs the Process thus: "From twelve Pounds of
 " *Black-Cherries* bruised, with their Stones, draw one
 " Gallon." By which it appears, that those Gentlemen's Process is liable to two Objections; the one for leaving out the Cherries, and the other for using too great a Proportion of the Stones. Upon which Consideration alone, I think their Enquiry, whether the genuine Black-Cherry Water of itself was salutary and innocent, or not, will be had of little or no Account: But I shall take some farther Notice of this, when I come to the Description of the Black-Cherry Water of the Shops.

In another Part of the Article you declare, *the Water from the very Laurel Leaves is harmless, when duly diluted.*

luted. But notwithstanding this, it is possible, that the Water in question may not be altogether safe in the tender Age of Infants; it may there have had the pernicious Effects, without having been suspected; the Symptoms it produces resembling such as Infants are frequently thrown into from their Diseases. I own I am at a Loss to answer to the Possibility of the Case, or that there may not something have happened without being suspected: But this I can say, that I have made the Black-Cherry Water in the Method that shall be set down, and which I always took to be agreeable to the Intention of the College Directions, though not expressly declared: This, I say, I have made for a great many Years, and used many Gallons of it in Prescriptions, and otherwise, for Childrens Disorders, yet could never possibly discern any ill Effects whatever, nor knew it suspected by any Physician in the tenderest Subject. I wish I could say as much of many of our Chemical Medicines, so much in vogue in the present Practice of Physic, and the fashionable Custom of taking Spirit of Hartshorn, at the very Beginning of almost every Disorder, in large Doses, and at random, without due Consideration had of the Nature of the Distemper, or Subject it is to work upon. A Practice of this kind is very likely to have introduced the Custom among Drinkers of Drams, (when the common Drams, by too frequent Use, do not stimulate enough) to take to Spirit of Hartshorn, in large Quantities, till some have come to that pass, as to take even a Dram Glass full at a time.

It is much to be lamented, that we often meet with terrible convulsive Fits, and such like Disorders, in Children in the Month, and afterwards till a Year or two old, which generally are fatal, or leave Children with such Disorders, that they seldom get over all their Lives

after : And if I may be allowed to account for the Cause of the Symptoms which are mostly to be found in such Subjects, I should attribute them to one or other of the following Particulars. In the Month I have too often found *Brandy* or *Gin* put into the Pap, to help to break Wind ; and then the Babe seldom fails, as the good Women say, to go to sleep upon it, and lye quiet ; but if that fails, and it is froward, they take to *Diascordium*, *Diacodium*, *Godfrey's* and *Squire's Elixir*, or some famous *Family Cordial*, that never fails to keep all things quiet ; and by this Method the Child dozes away the first Month or two ; and afterwards, when the Teeth begin to be troublesome, the same Medicines are administred ; and where this is the Case, is it to be wondered at, that Children should, from such bad Management, fall into Fits, attended with the worst of Symptoms ? This I have known to be frequently the Case, though it is difficult to get into the Secret when an Accident happens ; because then they are much upon their Guard, the good Women being sensible, that this Practice is not justifiable. The Fits are sometimes brought upon Children by a Humour, or Breaking-out, especially about the Head, which by wrong Management is checked, or by outward Applications too suddenly repelled, and thrown into the Blood ; and in such Cases terrible Accidents, or sudden Death, are mostly the Consequence : In these Disorders the *Black-Cherry Water* is seldom used till the Fits come on, and then in small Quantities, by way of Mixture or Julep : And surely, if it does not do any good here, I think it scarce possible it can do any harm.

I shall here set down my Method of making the *Black-Cherry Water*, and Manner of keeping it good for a Year or more, which is much questioned, nay, the contrary

trary asserted; but as I appeal to Experience and Facts, I am under no Concern about the Consequence. *The Water*: Take five Dozen of Black-Cherries, and draw the Juice from them, that the Stones may be the better bruised; then put the Juice and bruised Stones into a common Still, containing about twenty Gallons, and put to them as much Water as is usual in the Distillation of any other Simple Water, and draw off five Gallons, Wine Measure, which will be perfectly clear without straining, is very agreeable to the Taste, and to be esteemed for its good Flavour far preferable to the herbaceous simple Waters, which are often complained of in weak Stomachs and Children. Great Care is to be taken in the Distillation, that the Fire is not too fierce, and a Whisp of clean Straw, or something of that kind, should be laid at the bottom of the Still, to prevent the Water's having a bad empyreumatical Taste, by being burnt. I shall here offer a Query, whether the fourteen Pounds of the Cherry-Stones (especially if dry, as in the Process before related by the *Worcester* Gentlemen) be not more than equivalent, all things considered, to the five dozen of fresh Black-Cherries used in making the Black-Cherry Water of the Shops here set down, as far as respects the Strength drawn from the Kernels, which I leave to the Curious to consider.

For keeping the Water, I have commonly put it into a Stone-Bottle, and put over it a Paper, Bladder, and Leather, and tied it round with Packthread. Though once I kept some of it several Years in a Glass Bottle, stoped with a Cork and Leather under it, which I think to be as good a Way of keeping it as any; but it must be kept in a Vault or cool Cellar. Whatever be the Fate of Black-Cherry Water in your next Dispensatory, I believe

lieve the Apothecaries will find it necessary to keep it, as directed by our former *Pharmacopæia's*, which our Patients will require at our Hands, and tell us they are satisfied, that a moderate and physical Use of it has been time out of mind recommended by Physicians of the best Note; and it is not likely, that all you Gentlemen may be so well agreed upon this Point, as not to have some that will still approve of it. As to its *Virtue*, besides the Agreeableness of its Flavour, I should think as much might be said for it as for most of the other Simple Waters: But here I shall stop, to avoid the common Censure of *Ne futor ultra crepidam*. Besides, the Black-Cherry Water of the Shops has been in all your Dispensatories for above a hundred Years, has been ever since prescribed and directed by all our Physicians; and I never met with any one Objection or Suspicion of it, in former Times, in any Author whatever, and but very lately suspected by some few; and I think the whole Strength of the Suspicion amounts to no more than this, that a poisonous Water having been distilled from Black-Cherry Stones *alone*, in a Method never used nor thought on, some bad Effects may *possibly* have been produced by the Black-Cherry Water of the Shops, and therefore it ought to be laid aside. It is to be noted, that in making the Black-Cherry Water, no Fermentation is used; but it is to be drawn off before that comes on, and in the Manner before mentioned, as all other Simple Waters are; and I do not know of any Mixture or Julep more agreeable than that of three or four Parts of this Water and one Part of the *Compound Piony Water* of this present *Pharmacopæia*, with all its Imperfections. No doubt some Ingredients in the Piony Water are exceptionable, or might be retrenched; yet upon the whole, when
carefully

carefully made, it is as agreeable in its Taste and Flavour as any of the Waters of the Shops; and I think the Black-Cherry Juice (omitted in your *Draught*) contributes very much to it; for if the Juice be put to digest some Days with the Ingredients to give a gentle Fermentation, we find that the Black-Cherry Juice sends over the Helm something that renders this Water pleasant, and of a peculiar Flavour: And what induces me to draw this Conclusion is, that after the Simple Black-Cherry Water has been drawn off as before, I usually ferment the Remainder with a little new Yeast, and afterwards draw off a small Brandy, about five Quarts, that is very agreeable to the Palate, and near as pleasant as *French Brandy*. I might here make some Remarks upon the *Treacle* and *Compound Briony Waters*, the former of which has had the universal Approbation of all Practitioners, and in feverish Disorders from catching Cold, is the standing Remedy of the common People. As to the excessive Multiplicity of its Ingredients with which it is crowded, however absurd it may appear, yet more surely may be said for this, than for many other Alexipharmics, such as *Venice Treacle*, &c. which, to use a great Man's Words, are a huge Hodge-podge of Things wonderfully unlike each other; and because *Experience* hath established for standing Medicines, some body has this Expression, *That a wise Man will make use of that which none but a Fool could have invented*. The *Compound Briony Water*, whatever may be objected to some Particulars, of which the *Briony Root*, I find, is one; yet upon the whole, it has been found by Experience to make a pleasant and useful Cordial for *hypochondriacal* and *hysterical* Persons, and is good to settle the Fluids after a Journey, every way preferable to that *Caustic Spirit*

Spirit Brandy and Gin. This Water, as it stood in the former *Pharmacopæia's*, was copied by *Charas* and *Lemery*, who were great Critics in pharmaceutical Compositions, yet both pass it by uncensured: And I know you will have some Remarks upon these Waters from another Hand, which, no doubt, will have their Weight.

I have one thing more to add, and that is, to propose to your farther Consideration, whether, in your *Draught* for reforming the *Pharmacopæia*, you have not gone too far in abridging some Compositions of great Antiquity and general Use; for surely, what has been noted by an excellent Judge of these Matters in his *Pharmacopæia Extemporanea*, may with great Justness be applied to the present Purpose: *Si cuiquam ergo cordi & curæ est, ut medicinæ prisca dignitas restituatur, & Æsculapii templum ardelionibus repurgetur; jejuna hac præxi dimissa, magnifice præscribat, pulcre variet, & Empiricorum captum superet necesse est.*

I hope, Gentlemen, you will be so kind as to put a favourable Construction upon what I have advanced in this Letter, assuring you that I have done it with an honest Intention; and as what you have already published is only designed for a *Draught* of a more complete Work, and not the ultimate Result of your Deliberations, these few Observations in my own way may have their Use. I heartily wish good Success to the Undertaking, and when you have finished the *London Pharmacopæia*, there is no one shall be more ready to follow your Directions with true Faithfulness, and submit to your better Judgment with all Readiness, than, Gentlemen, with due Respect,

Your most Obedient Humble Servant,

Canter Street, Oct. 16. 1743.

Richard Reynell.